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ABSTRACT

This paper explores an expanded vision of teacher education as it relates to the concept of personal and marginalized identity. A study conducted in an all-male correctional facility tells the cultural stories of marginalized people who have had an implicit influence on teachers' experiences and development. Teacher development is defined as a personal account of a detailed, interactive narrative that is about the education and re-education of the imprisoned self. Prisoners, described as individuals who are seized, confined, and held captive in restrictive spaces, are unique in that no other group lives as a culture in maximum security while seeking educational opportunities. This paper presents vignettes from the lives and stories, writings and sharings, of inmates in prison utilizing a narrative ethnographic approach. This method provides for self-conscious inquiry about an educational story-line that focuses on the interpretation of experience and about the cultural story that makes broader sense of lived experience in a relational and inventive context. It is suggested that work on the margins in maximum security promotes greater sensitivity to the lives of imprisonment one might experience as teacher educator, teacher, or student. (Contains 22 references.) (LL)

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The marginal Self:
Living in maximum security

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The marginal Self:
Living in maximum security

Abstract

The personal and cultural stories of marginalized people who have had an implicit influence on our experiences as teachers need to be further explored in the teacher education literature. Prisoners are unique in that no other group lives as a culture in maximum security while seeking educational opportunities. Using a narrative ethnographic approach, I attend to the lives and stories, writings and sharings of inmates in prison. I also attend to my own teacher development story. My assumption is that my work on the margins in maximum security promotes greater sensitivity to our lives of imprisonment as teacher educators, teachers and students. My intention is to explore an expanded vision of teacher education as relating to the concept of personal and marginalized identity and as understood by being constructed narratively.

GLOSSARY OF MY OWN TERMS

narrative - as self-conscious inquiry about an educational story-line that focuses on the interpretation of experience;
teacher development story - as a personal account of a detailed, interactive narrative that is about the education and re-education of the imprisoned self;
autobiography - as a self-story that is a meaningful curricular construct;
curriculum - as both text and situation for exploring educational experiences and events;
prisoner - as someone who is seized, confined and held captive, in restrictive and/or expansive spaces;
ethnography - as the cultural story that makes broader sense of lived experience but in a relational and inventive context.

In this paper I tell the story of my doctoral research in an all-male correctional facility. I am shaping my story, or rather because its impetus is inquiry, my "narrative" to our AERA symposium on "Narrative and Voice: Marginalized Perspectives in Teacher Education." Each of us on the panel is representing a perspective on a socially marginalized group in the context of schooling, education and teacher education. We are acknowledging the diverse perspectives of prisoners, immigrants, students, teachers and researchers. Each of us is also making use of narrative as a powerful approach to marginalized aspects of our own researcher and teacher selves. Our interrelated papers deal with narrative ethnographic research that has been undertaken from the margins of teacher education.

I am construing marginality as one critical perspective on, and dimension of, the theme of imprisonment in teacher education. Marginality is a concept that gives form and method to my study of inmates' incarceration and experience of imprisonment as well as my own. As a young female researcher in a world of imprisoned men, social workers, discharge planners and counsellors, correctional officers and administrators, I "lived" in maximum security for eighteen months throughout 1991 and 1992. In my attempt to relate the world of Corrections to Education, I have many stories to tell. My experience of *marginality* as in tension with *connection* is central to them.

My own marginality was expressed in my work in a local correctional facility as I explored the marginality of society's segregated people. My identification with inmates enhanced my awareness and knowledge of my own marginality. In living on the margins of a culture of maximum security, I paradoxically connected to inmates as they sought educational opportunities and struggled with minimal resources. Pinar (1988) recognizes this possibility of identification with a marginalized social group as a key educational, autobiographical and curricular issue.

My narrative ethnographic research has been undertaken from the *margins* of teacher education. It is, contradictorily, responsive to critical perspectives on education, teacher development and inquiry. My perspective on narrative ethnographic research focuses on myself and

inmates in a relational context that I understand through personal, institutional, and social narratives. Another way of quickly getting at this interactive narrative process is to think of "autoethnography" as used by Diamond (1992) to refer to a meaning-making approach that provides teachers with the opportunity to engage in mutual collaborative inquiry. In the context of my own study, I -- as female teacher, researcher, co-facilitator and co-ordinator -- functioned in three rehabilitative programmes alongside my inmate-students as partners in curriculum making.

I am organizing my narrative inquiry into people's experiences of marginality around an unusual schooling story and relating it to teacher development and education in general. My assumption is that, in addition to prisoners, the worlds of marginalized immigrants, students, teachers and researchers can benefit from the kind of inquiry that narratively promotes the construction and reconstruction of the meaning of experience for participants within cultural worlds. My understanding of narrative inquiry has been developing over the years; I relate narrative inquiry to life stories and histories, teacher development, the meaning of dreams, and other alternative -- or marginalized -- perspectives. I understand narrative inquiry as a qualitative process, phenomenon, and method (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990) that empowers me to create and re-create my Self and Others within a paradigm of authoring and selfhood (Diamond, 1993). This paradigm is resonating for me within the worlds of Education and Corrections as I struggle to educate myself and others about stories of imprisonment. Implicit in these stories of imprisonment is the powerful individual, institutional, and social narratives that need telling. Paradoxically, as we tell our own stories of imprisonment in the process of pushing against the boundaries of traditions in educational research that have prescribed forms and expectations we may marginalize ourselves.

The term "marginality" is difficult for me to define, partly because it resonates with my experience of "connection," and partly because it is reflected in the various levels of story that contextualize my study and feelings. I am understanding marginality to mean being forced onto the outside by a complex web of images of institutional control and restraint, and prescribed curricula, selfhood, and educative relationships. The

notion of researcher as marginal-insider and curriculum-maker disturbs personal and professional boundaries and challenges pressures to conform to research conventions, methods, and paradigms, even those of narrative inquiry. All of these images help me to contextualize a matrix of Self, story, culture, institutions and society that inspires creating while in our chains. As I create in my own chains I see myself as marginal in the sense that my orientation moves me along adjoining edges of two worlds. But, it is along the adjoining edges that my insider's perspective developed, that I connected with others, and that my teacher development story became re-shaped.

Background and Context

Prisoners are the orphaned children of our society and the outcasts of our educational system. We banish a part of ourselves when we label. Prisoners are people who are both capable of tenderness and understanding, recovery and creativity. Strangely enough, we even banish a part of ourselves when we fear knowing about people who demonstrate their capacity to commit crimes and recidivists who repeat offences (the "revolving door" syndrome) against humanity and themselves. We build red-brick schoolhouses, calling them "detention" centres and even "fortresses," and turn our backs. We absorb others' representations, and stereotype prisoners as irredeemably wicked and wanton (Jones, 1992). In this way, we help perpetuate a vision of marginality that is mis-educative to the core of who we are. We construct perspectives on prisoners without reference to personally lived accounts of the inside. Abstract accounts of ordinary prisoners distance us from the humanity of inmates (see, for example, Davies, 1990; Harlow, 1987, and Lovitt, 1992). Without having experienced incarceration, some writers appropriate the authority of ordinary prisoners. They authorize themselves to construct "prison knowledge...in the context of mechanized space" (Davies, p.26, 229). Such accounts would be more meaningful to me if their writers had tried to understand the lived experience of *the inside*.

As teacher-educators, we need to consider the meanings we invent about marginalized others. In this way, we can take responsibility for re-inventing our meanings through sustained, ethnographic inquiry.

McClane, an American writer-professor, sensed, in a single creative writing visit to Auburn Correctional Facility, the humanity of his banished "brothers." What draws me to his perspective is the depth of his own humanity and the recognition that

> **Whatever these inmates were - and all of them were sentenced to Auburn for corporal crimes - they would not permit me to view them merely as maniacs, psychopaths, or what have you. They were people, cussed and joy-filled: people capable of tenderness and murder: people like me and yet unlike me, because I haven't yet, thank goodness, killed anyone (1988, p.230).**

Only some of the correctional literature reinforces the human dimension of my research. I find autobiographies of prisoners, such as Caron (1978, 1985), Harris (1986), MacDonald (1988) and Sharansky (1988), very useful for their insider's perspective. Biographies that are written by researchers who rely on prisoners' stories as told in their own words (Padel and Stevenson, 1988) can be treated as teacher development texts. Such full-bodied accounts by inmate-insiders are rare if not privileged methodologically, at least in my own experience. My own account is, in comparison, academic and distant, but nevertheless promising experientially.

Prisoners as Marginalized

The very term, 'prisoners,' no doubt encourages our social narrative of inmates as captive misfits, heroic and anti-heroic convicts, and misanthropic wrong-doers. I wish to contribute to the re-invention of the term 'prisoners' in order to help in the effort of negotiating new possibilities in how we construe life behind bars, metaphors of self, and the educative process and relationships. I wish to give a sense of the "ongoing experiential text" of my inmate-students' lives as they told their stories to me in words that "reflect upon life and explain themselves" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p.4). I am construing this experiential account as a critical part of my own teacher development story which is situated in my study of the penal milieu.

Anyone who works or lives in a correctional system soon learns to adjust their own rhythms to its constraints: for instance, the rotational cycle is a reality that places great pressure on the continuity and success of rehabilitative programmes and working relationships. Inmates, remanded until their court dates, are detained in the jail functioning, colloquially speaking, as a "holding cell." On rotation, inmates move through various cell blocks of the jail to await court trials and sentencing, transfer to other detention centres (maximum or medium/minimum security depending on the outcome of the trial), or release on bail. Often, I met with an inmate for a creative writing session or sessions only before one of the above scenarios was activated. Our interpersonal rhythms were subsequently disrupted and our curricular objectives rendered unfulfilled.

A number of the inmate-students with who I have worked help exemplify various dimensions of this theme of prisoner as marginalized. In my thesis and in a previous paper, "Prisoner as artist: A preliminary look at a Creative Writing programme" (Mullen, 1992), I have worked on developing portraits of my creative writing students that convey a fuller sense of my interactions with them than I can hope to illustrate here. I have selected three of my inmate-portraits and given them attention as material for a script about marginality in a correctional setting. A fourth selection on this theme is provided in section, "Researcher as Marginalized" (see sub-section "Female on a carousel").

Vignette One: Kirk, the Poet

Kirk (pseudonym), a native Indian, lives without hope. His long black hair somehow drew a barrier between him and the rest of us in the Drug Awareness programme of the jail where we met. He approached me after a few months and, with a long side-glance, mumbled that he would like me to take a look at his poetry. Later, Kirk and I spent several intense sessions reading through his thick and mostly typed file of poetry. I wrote, in my Prison Journal, that

> **Kirk had difficulty locating a poem of hope in his impressive file. After many long moments, he found nuances of hope in a long poem. Now I wonder: Was I imposing hope and healing on him, or was I possibly**

moving him towards hope and healing in his life beyond his written text, or was I in fact clued in to a sub-text of his poetry? (Session: 16 December 1991)

We connected, and yet I had possibly marginalized Kirk when I again pressed him for a poem of hope. The orphaned child in his poem, "Diminishing Reality" (1991), may be himself and his own child. Kirk, as a homeless native and inmate, is doubly orphaned while spending "many many nights alone/Locked within a sleeping tomb." When pressed, he nodded saying that his little girl is Hope to him. Kirk reflects his own feeling of marginality in powerful images of abandonment, aloneness, violence and heroin use, death, and creative struggle in his many poems. A sample of his poetry was published in *The creative writer*, the correctional newsletter that I initiated and coordinated as part of the Creative Writing programme.

Kirk teaches us about the power of the timeless child within that can play a significant role in reconstructing the Self and re-awakening to one's deeper creativity. He connected, on another level, by virtue of sharing his poem and its meaning with me. (Below are excerpts of a longer poem). His silent dedication to his daughter is the glimmer of hope in a world he otherwise experiences as 'diminishing':

Diminishing Reality

Oh come to me won't you please
Listen to what I feel
Many many nights alone
Locked within a sleeping tomb.

Memories of a child in time
The boy still cries inside
Dreamt of many things so grand...
No one loved a child, it's late
Cast away beyond the reach
Pretend to be was made of me.

Silent tears came to me
Memories they are so clear
Hurt the child, mentally
Full life would never come to be.

Bleeding, it hurts to know
Crying, my pain it shows
Lonely in this world so scared
Not knowing where to go, betrayed.

Keep your dreams inside the heart
I know you lost a bigger part
Someday you'll find the missing spot
Someday someone will come to heal your heart...

***

Beginnings. No sophisticated story-line, no sense-making of particulars. No polish. Only the raw experience.

Alec, although an insider, returned to his cell marginalized with respect to the language barrier within the institution. As marginal-insider I waited for a correctional officer (guard) to key the electronically controlled elevator. Next I signed out and then moved to the electronically controlled airless room called the "mousetrap" to be identified; signing out again, I exited. The guard in the control room watched: one set, and then another set, of front doors shut behind me as my image exited on the monitor.

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Vignette Three: Sammy, Student & Letter Writer

Sammy (pseudonym), my heavily tattooed native student, quickly moved through many formal high school courses with me. He was my most devoted student. Over a one-year period we together accomplished Basic and Advanced English, Family Studies, Canadian Law, and Accounting. Sammy showed no particular interest in creative writing per se but he did wish to write letters to his estranged daughter as well as to me. We began writing back-and-forth once he was transferred from Protective Custody to a maximum security federal prison. When I discovered from his first letter to me that he was reflecting on his childhood and inviting me to do the same, I framed our inquiry. I included a sample of our letter-writing exchanges in the correctional newsletter.

This story of connection knows its other half: Sammy wrote persistently to me and even consulted with the other Education Coordinators to encourage me to respond more frequently. He sometimes asked me personal questions, challenging my request-turned-stipulation that we were to write with respect to educational themes only. I consulted with my colleagues at OISE. The consensus was that concern for my safety should override my temptation to develop a case study on the educational life and pursuits of one inmate.

By virtue of the inappropriateness of Sammy's demands and my inability to deal with him even more firmly, I felt that he was making me his prisoner.

The more aware I became of Sammy's feelings, the stronger I felt compelled to create rigid boundaries in order to protect my safety. During class time I had worked on subtlety: I began wearing my grandmother's wedding ring to jail. When Sammy and others asked about it I referred to my imaginary fiance. My favourite Education Coordinator laughed warmly when she noticed the ring, chuckling that it was a good idea but that it would probably fail to work its charm. Sammy had, inadvertently, helped me to become 'street smart' on the inside. While caught inside the "mousetrap" of our work together over the months, I felt both connected and confined. I can imagine that Sammy felt the same: he longed, each week, for contact and became morose but remained persistent. Today he is without a pen pal.

Researcher as Marginalized

I am viewing jails as legitimate and powerful schooling sites; correctional programmes as educational forums and processes, and inmates as motivated partners in curriculum making, teachers and learners, and creative writers. Because I work on the margins of teacher education, I am aware that I may be marginalizing myself. My development as a researcher-teacher within an unusual schooling site is outside the norm. The norm is research that links graduate students and professors to established fields of inquiry within Faculties of Education and to classrooms within 'regular', albeit heterogeneous, school systems. When I seek a university appointment, those hiring may regard me as too avant-garde and my curricular spirit as too self-orchestrated to be of interest. This is a paradox. I wanted to find a way to connect my field to conventional education research, thus re-envisioning it to create open spaces.

Institutional cycles and rhythms

The marginality I experienced in the jail came partly from the way I responded to the institutional cycles and rhythms, procedures and regulations that define the jail as mechanized space. When I met with the inmates on a weekly basis, I never quite knew what to expect, whom I was going to see, or what we were going to do. The Education Coordinator kindly 'warned' me in a letter not to expect too much from my inmate-

students in terms of productivity in such a challenging and unpredictable place. Her concern was that I was "over working" with respect to the copiousness of my stories, written as journal entries, to inmate-students. In retrospect, I imagine that she sensed my need to question, especially in my role as the Coordinator of the Creative Writing programme that I established and taught solo, some of the constraints and regulations of the jail. Notwithstanding the questioning, I also initiated a system of regulation and documentation that involved the Education Coordinator and me in dialogue about the new programme and its scheduling, rhythms, and developments.

Dreams as poetic insight

In my experience of marginality I sometimes felt connected while "living" in maximum security. As I came to understand better the constraints and regulations of the jail, I also learned to revision its open spaces and to function within them. In a dream I anticipated the possibility of open spaces while incarcerated. This dream is a lively account of the dynamic communication between the inmates and me within the spaces of honeycomb cells in an amphitheatre (June 6, 1991). This dream, like the others that I view as educational, is part of my ongoing experiential text that influences me (see Mullen, Master's thesis, 1990 and doctoral thesis, 1993). I worked towards accomplishing this poetic vision of dynamic communication, in jail, of being connected while feeling marginalized.

Dreams are a critical source of insight for me. They tell me how I construct and reconstruct the world of my research. The cognizant researcher makes use of her subjectivities, and their origins and influences, to aid in her understanding of the culture she is studying.

Prescribed curricula

Creative writers such as myself and the inmates respond to the confined spaces of a prescribed curricula with far less enthusiasm than to our own creative writing. Indeed, at times, my inmate-students performed impressively, if not magically, *when they had greater control* of their own curricula. I celebrated this spirit of mutual exchange and negotiated curricula in our correctional newsletter (Mullen, 1992). I selected, for the

purpose of representing multiple forms of expression, material that my inmate-students produced. Some inmate-writers, with less than high school education, produced, for their personal satisfaction, poetry, musical lyrics, drawings and art, short stories, novelistic segments, and journals and letters. Some of my inmate-students resisted prescribed curricula and favoured instead their own self-directed, often artistic, endeavours. We connected in our efforts. For security reasons, I contributed anonymously as editor and journal writer. I have attempted to illustrate here that images of marginality and connection can be interwoven to reflect a complex educational narrative about the rhythms and regulations of a confined prison environment and its prescribed and invented curricula.

Female on a carousel

As volunteer in a variety of capacities, my visits never took me directly to the ranges and cells but rather to the interview rooms on a number of floors. I often spent hours on a merry-go-round searching for an available room in which to meet the inmates on my list (men in Protective Custody, for example, could not be moved to an interview room on another floor). This set-up suited me fine. I felt frustrated with those inmates who yelled obscenities out to me from their cages, or who, while travelling in packs, made inappropriate comments and lewd gestures, or, who, while on the elevators jammed up against one another and carts filled with supplies, leered. Yet, once alone, these same men acted very respectably and appreciatively towards volunteers whom they mythologized as saints and do-gooders.

For example, when I worked with Mike one afternoon, inmates from his range continually poked their heads in our interview room. The signalling of 'thumbs-up' to him referred implicitly to me. Eyes flashed suggestively to my legs. I felt caged. The correctional officers on duty were nowhere to be seen. While sitting, blushing, and sitting and blushing some more, I quickly calculated that the guards were being detained on the ranges. Mike, my musician-student, offered that he, too, takes exception to inmates' offensive behaviour on the ranges. We continued to talk poetry without the guards in sight. In one of his poems turned song he envisoned himself as a "frozen pony on a carousel halted in mid-gallop." He related

this image of the carousel to being an object on a merry-go-round in prison, consequently putting into words how I felt. Did he know how I felt? It was Mike's image of imprisonment that connected me to myself and to him as we sat in that stuffy and abandoned room like two frozen ponies on a carousel halted in mid-gallop.

Teacher-educators as Marginalized

Teacher-educators are also marginalized. One antiphonal account by two teacher-educators reflects on their induction to the professoriate (Knowles and Cole, in press). In their letters to each other in different academic institutions and cities, Knowles and Cole express mutual feelings of isolation and need for personal space. They interpret their experience as awakening to the need for conditions and opportunities conducive to professional development. The challenge for teacher-educators may be to explore creative enterprises that enhance awareness of personal knowledge and subjectivity, and conditions for facilitating stories interactively in community (Diamond, 1992).

How can we open up spaces for ourselves in academe? *We may need to live on the margins of educational research and practice in order to create spaces within the constraints of our individual, institutional, and social narratives.* We may even need to re-think ourselves in order to provide fresh perspectives on how the world of Teacher Education can be re-imagined and recast. Rose (1990) had to alter his taken-for-granted methodology during his research inquiry into the lives of working-class black men. As he attempted to live alongside his participants, he changed his thinking as an ethnographer, altering the received practices and traditions of his paradigm in order to create anew.

Epilogue

Are we, as teacher educators, teachers and students, living in maximum security? Are we inmates marginalized by powerful narratives about what constitutes legitimate research, teaching, and Selfhood? Or, are we learning how to move gracefully on the periphery of metaphoric worlds and within the hearts of the oppressed? As I draw from my own lived experience of manoeuvering between and within the world of Education

and Corrections, I am struggling to understand how we can broaden conventional, if not restrictive, understandings of schooling. This notion, that the idea of education needs to be questioned, opened up and finally broadened, is pursued extensively by Connelly and Clandinin (1988) in their formulations of possibility. They reflect on the value of personal knowledge, narrative inquiry, and interpretative case study to teacher education as I do, but in the context of prison education.

As I write within the prison cell of my own being, I am coming to associate researching the margins with living more deeply and expansively. I am, simultaneously, the prisoner in blue leaning against a beige wall and the street-researcher with an insatiable quest for experiences that are first-hand, concrete and immediate, and sensory.

As I write to expand within the prison cells of others, I am inspired to encourage innovation and fresh perpectives on prescribed curricula. In anticipating the 21st century in Teacher Education, we may need to sweep out some of the old ideas concerning society's marginalized groups. If we stimulate a liberal approach to inmates, for instance, then we may view them as paying for their crimes with loss of freedom. We can challenge our taken-for-granted assumptions in the penal system by encouraging education instead of idleness. We can challenge ourselves to look again, but first we must live alongside our participants.

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